



Oral Statement

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775th Meeting of the African Union Peace and Security Council: Open Session on the Principles of Protection of Civilians in Conflict Areas in Africa

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Amnesty International welcomes this opportunity to contribute to this important and timely discussion on the principles of protection of civilians in conflict areas in Africa.

Our contribution specifically speaks to the third tier of the 2010 Draft Guidelines for the Protection of Civilians in African Union Peace Support Operations which, as rightly pointed out in the concept note, focuses on embracing a rights-based approach to protection of civilians.

On a number of occasions, AU peacekeepers have been accused of serious abuses and violations of the rights of the civilians they have been deployed to protect. Yet, mechanisms for holding AU troops accountable for their acts and misconduct remain ad-hoc and generally insufficient. The responsibility of peacekeepers accountability so far lies with troop-contributing countries, with the AU and the peacekeeping mission playing little significant role in the process. The AU lacks a mechanism to follow-up the outcomes of disciplinary or criminal proceedings initiated by troop-contributing countries. Where the AU has indicated that investigations have been initiated to determine whether specific peacekeepers committed alleged violations, the outcome of these processes have been rarely released to the public.

How then does the AU strengthen its accountability mechanisms and institutionalize respect for International Humanitarian Law and human rights in its peace support operations? Amnesty International wishes to make three proposals for the consideration of the Peace and Security Council, all of which build on the ongoing AU institutional reform process and specifically the August 2016 Report of the AU high Representative on Peace Fund:

- First, we propose that pursuant to Article 8(5) of the PSC Protocol, the Council should establish within its structure a committee on human rights charged with ensuring that respect, protection and promotion of human rights are incorporated or integrated in all of its policies and actions;
- Second, we propose that the PSC should call on the AU Commission Chairperson to establish a standing and independent oversight mechanism for investigating human rights and IHL violations committed by peacekeeping forces;
- Third, we reiterate not only the calls made here today on the urgent adoption of the 2010 Draft Guidelines, but we also call for the fast-tracking of the ongoing development of the AU's integrated compliance frameworks. In particular, time has come for the PSC to ensure the finalization and adoption of the Draft AU Conduct and Discipline Policy and the Draft AU Policy on Prevention and Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in AU peace support operations.